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SHRIMATI KIRRON KHER (CHANDIGARH): Madam, I want to raise an extremely important issue that affects over 4.3 million Regarding promotion of traditional art and crafts and some of them are women.

There are some murmurs that Handloom Reservation Act might be scrapped by the Government. I do not know whether the Government is planning to do this or when they are going to do it but going by the voices of the powerloom lobbies and the handloom workers in the media, it seems that there is some move in that direction. If that is the case, I request the Government to reconsider it for the sake of not just Indian art and crafts but for the sake of those 4.3 million workers and their families who will be left without any means of livelihood if power looms start mass producing cloth that has been traditionally handmade which you, myself, and many gentlemen and the ladies in the House wear.

Handloom is the soul of India. Our handloom workers are dying a death anyway because there is not that great market boost given to them. It is more expensive to weave but we have to preserve it because it is a part of actually what India is all about.

There is an argument backed by mills that the Act currently exists only on paper but then if that is the case, why is this urgency and lobby to try and get it repealed?

The truth is that the powerloom lobbies are already without legitimacy weaving these things and they are mass producing. The weavers cannot compete with it. They have the skills of rural India. They cannot reach urban markets. So, the current move to revise the Act is only to seize the demand for the handloom in the market.

Powerloom imitations masquerading as handlooms is the actual issue. They want legitimacy for the present practice of deceit. We need to promote our handloom sector. We need to help our weavers who live below the poverty line.

For this, we need to take several measures. We need to promote entrepreneurship among the weavers and get them access to technology so that they can market their products. Without this protection, the market will be flooded with cheap textiles that the handloom products cannot compete with. Yet, the soul of the traditional items will be changed and altered for ever.

As a nation, as policy makers, we need to give a thrust to our dying arts, culture and crafts.

I strongly believe that the Handloom Reservation Act must stay in order to protect our weavers and I request our Government to give an assurance to this House that nothing will be done which will affect their livelihood negatively. It is because Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Benaras, which is the constituency of our Prime Minister, are affected. But none of the Ministers seem to have heard what I have said or are pretending not to hear. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER: Shri Vinod Khanna, Kumari Shobha Karandlaje, Shrimati Jyoti Dhurve, Shrimati Mala Rajyalakshmi Shah, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Shri Sanjay Dhotre, Shri Nishikant Dubey, Shri Shivkumar Udasi and Dr. Kirit P. Solanki are allowed to associate with the matter raised by Shrimati Kirron Kher.